1. (currently amended) A computer-implemented method for automatically assigning a group of agents to a plurality of available schedules, comprising the steps of:

determining preferences for a plurality of factors for each agent;

assigning an order of importance for the plurality of factors for each agent, wherein the order of importance for the plurality of factors for a given agent in the group of agents differs from an order of importance for the plurality of factors for at least one other agent in the group of agents;

determining a ranking for each agent from a highest rank to a lowest rank based on a given criteria;

performing the following sub-steps on an iterative basis, from a highest ranked agent to a lowest ranked agent:

(a) for each schedule that is available to be assigned to a current agent, performing the following sub-steps:

(i) for the current agent, for each factor, determining a difference value between a current schedule and the current agent's preference for that factor;

(ii) assigning the difference value for each factor to a bit range within a vector for the current agent and the current schedule, wherein the factor having a highest importance is assigned to a highest order bits of the vector and remaining factors are assigned to subsequent orders of bits in an assigned order of importance, wherein the vector represents a numerical value that indicates how well the current schedule fits the current agent's preferences; and

(b) assigning to the current agent the schedule having the lowest numerical value;

wherein one or more of the steps are performed by one or more electronic processing devices.

2. (Cancelled).

3. (Canceled).

4. (currently amended) The computer-implemented method of Claim 1 wherein the agents are ranked according to seniority.

5. (currently amended) The computer-implemented method of Claim 1 wherein the agents are ranked according to performance.

6. (currently amended) The computer-implemented method of Claim 1 wherein a schedule may only be assigned from a higher ranked agent to a lower ranked agent if such assignment will decrease the lower ranked agent's vector without increasing the vector of the higher ranked agent.

7. (currently amended) The computer-implemented method of Claim 1 wherein the plurality of factors is selected from the group of start times, break times, lunch times, days off, end time, lunch length, split shift parameters and hours worked.

8. (currently amended) The computer-implemented method of Claim 1 wherein the plurality of schedules are preliminarily assigned schedules.

9. (currently amended) The computer-implemented method of Claim 1 wherein the plurality of schedules are a pool of schedules.

10. (Canceled).

11. (Canceled).

12. (Canceled).

13. (previously presented) The computer program product of Claim 20 wherein the agents are ranked according to seniority.

14. (previously presented) The computer program product of Claim 20 wherein the agents are ranked according to performance.

15. (previously presented) The computer program product of Claim 20 wherein a schedule may only be assigned from a higher ranked agent to a lower ranked agent if such assignment will decrease the lower ranked agent's vector without increasing the vector of the higher ranked agent.

16. (previously presented) The computer program product of Claim 20 wherein the plurality of factors is selected from the group of start times, break times, lunch times, days off, end time, lunch length, split shift parameters and hours worked.

17. (previously presented) The computer program product of Claim 20 wherein the plurality of schedules are preliminarily assigned schedules.

18. (previously presented) The computer program product of Claim 20 wherein the plurality of schedules are a pool of schedules.

19. (currently amended) A computer-implemented method for automatically assigning a group of agents to a plurality of initially assigned schedules, comprising the steps of:

determining preferences for a plurality of factors for each agent;

assigning an order of importance for the plurality of factors for each agent;

determining a ranking for each agent from a highest rank to a lowest rank based on a given criteria;

performing the following sub-steps on an iterative basis, from a highest ranked agent to a lowest ranked agent:

(a) for the current agent, for each factor, determining a difference value between a currently assigned schedule and the current agent's preference for that factor;

(b) assigning the difference value for each factor to a bit range within an assigned vector for the current agent and the currently assigned schedule, wherein the factor having a highest importance is assigned to a highest order bits of the vector and remaining factors are assigned to subsequent orders of bits in an assigned order of importance, wherein the vector represents a numerical value that indicates how well the current schedule fits the current agent's preferences;

(c) for each schedule that is assigned to an agent that is lower in ranking than the current agent, performing the following sub-steps:

(i) for the current lower-ranked agent, for each factor, determining a difference value between the current lower-ranked agent's schedule and the current agent's preference for that factor;

(ii) assigning the difference value for each factor to a bit range within a vector for the current lower-ranked agent and the current lower-ranked agent's schedule, wherein the factor having a highest importance is assigned to a highest order bits of the vector and remaining factors are assigned to subsequent orders of bits in an assigned order of importance, wherein the vector represents a numerical value that indicates how well the current lower-ranked agent's schedule fits the current agent's preferences; and

(d) if a lower-ranked agent has a schedule with a lower numerical value than the current agent's currently assigned schedule, exchanging the schedules between those agents;

wherein one or more of the steps are performed by one or more electronic processing devices.

20. (previously presented) A computer program product tangibly embodying computer program instructions executable by one or more electronic processing devices for performing a method that automatically assigns a group of agents to a plurality of available schedules, the method comprising:

determining preferences for a plurality of factors for each agent;

assigning an order of importance for the plurality of factors for each agent, wherein the order of importance for the plurality of factors for a given agent in the group of agents differs from an order of importance for the plurality of factors for at least one other agent in the group of agents;

determining a ranking for each agent from a highest rank to a lowest rank based on a given criteria;

performing the following sub-steps on an iterative basis, from a highest ranked agent to a lowest ranked agent:

(a) for each schedule that is available to be assigned to a current agent, performing the following sub-steps:

(i) for the current agent, for each factor, determining a difference value between a current schedule and the current agent's preference for that factor;

(ii) assigning the difference value for each factor to a bit range within a vector for the current agent and the current schedule, wherein the factor having a highest importance is assigned to a highest order bits of the vector and remaining factors are assigned to subsequent orders of bits in an assigned order of importance, wherein the vector represents a numerical value that indicates how well the current schedule fits the current agent's preferences; and

(b) assigning to the current agent the schedule having the lowest numerical value.